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## How to Spur People On to Success

PETE BARLOW WAS AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE. HE HAD A DOG-AND-PONY act and spent his life traveling with circuses and vaudeville shows. I loved to watch Pete train new dogs for his act. I noticed that the moment a dog showed the slightest improvement, Pete patted and praised him and gave him meat and made a great to-do about it.

That's nothing new. Animal trainers have been using that same technique for centuries.

Why, I wonder, don't we use the same common sense when trying to change people that we use when trying to change dogs? Why don't we use meat instead of a whip? Why don't we use praise instead of condemnation? Let us praise even the slightest improvement. That inspires the other person to keep on improving.

In his book *I Ain't Much, Baby—But I'm All I Got*, the psychologist Jess Lair comments: "Praise is like sunlight to the warm human spirit; we cannot flower and grow without it. And yet, while most of us are only too ready to apply to others the cold

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wind of criticism, we are somehow reluctant to give our fellow the warm sunshine of praise.”\*

I can look back at my own life and see where a few words of praise have sharply changed my entire future. Can't you say the same thing about your life? History is replete with striking illustrations of the sheer witchery of praise.

For example, many years ago a boy of ten was working in a factory in Naples. He longed to be a singer, but his first teacher discouraged him. “You can't sing,” he said. “You haven't any voice at all. It sounds like the wind in the shutters.”

But his mother, a poor peasant woman, put her arms about him and praised him and told him she knew he could sing, she could already see an improvement, and she went barefoot in order to save money to pay for his music lessons. That peasant mother's praise and encouragement changed that boy's life. His name was Enrico Caruso, and he became the greatest and most famous opera singer of his age.

In the early nineteenth century, a young man in London aspired to be a writer. But everything seemed to be against him. He had never been able to attend school more than four years. His father had been flung in jail because he couldn't pay his debts, and this young man often knew the pangs of hunger. Finally, he got a job pasting labels on bottles of blacking in a rat-infested warehouse, and he slept at night in a dismal attic room with two other boys—guttersnipes from the slums of London. He had so little confidence in his ability to write that he sneaked out and mailed his first manuscript in the dead of night so nobody would laugh at him. Story after story was refused. Finally the great day came when one was accepted. True, he wasn't paid a shilling for it, but one editor had praised him. One editor had given him recognition. He was so thrilled that he wandered aimlessly around the streets with tears rolling down his cheeks.

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\*Jess Lair, *I Ain't Much, Baby—But I'm All I Got* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1976), p. 248.

## *Be a Leader*

The praise, the recognition, that he received through getting one story in print, changed his whole life, for if it hadn't been for that encouragement, he might have spent his entire life working in rat-infested factories. You may have heard of that boy. His name was Charles Dickens.

Another boy in London made his living as a clerk in a dry-goods store. He had to get up at five o'clock, sweep out the store, and slave for fourteen hours a day. It was sheer drudgery and he despised it. After two years, he could stand it no longer, so he got up one morning and, without waiting for breakfast, tramped fifteen miles to talk to his mother, who was working as a housekeeper.

He was frantic. He pleaded with her. He wept. He swore he would kill himself if he had to remain in the shop any longer. Then he wrote a long, pathetic letter to his old schoolmaster, declaring that he was heartbroken, that he no longer wanted to live. His old schoolmaster gave him a little praise and assured him that he really was very intelligent and fitted for finer things and offered him a job as a teacher.

That praise changed the future of that boy and made a lasting impression on the history of English literature. For that boy went on to write innumerable bestselling books and made over a million dollars with his pen. You've probably heard of him. His name: H. G. Wells.

Use of praise instead of criticism is the basic concept of B. F. Skinner's teachings. This great contemporary psychologist has shown by experiments with animals and with humans that when criticism is minimized and praise emphasized, the good things people do will be reinforced and the poorer things will atrophy for lack of attention.

John Ringelspaugh of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, used this in dealing with his children. It seemed that, as in so many families, mother and dad's chief form of communication with the children was yelling at them. And, as in so many cases, the children became a little worse rather than better after each such session—and so

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did the parents. There seemed to be no end in sight for this problem.

Mr. Ringelspaugh determined to use some of the principles he was learning in our course to solve this situation. He reported: "We decided to try praise instead of harping on their faults. It wasn't easy when all we could see were the negative things they were doing; it was really tough to find things to praise. We managed to find something, and within the first day or two some of the really upsetting things they were doing quit happening. Then some of their other faults began to disappear. They began capitalizing on the praise we were giving them. They even began going out of their way to do things right. Neither of us could believe it. Of course, it didn't last forever, but the norm reached after things leveled off was so much better. It was no longer necessary to react the way we used to. The children were doing far more right things than wrong ones." All of this was a result of praising the slightest improvement in the children rather than condemning everything they did wrong.

This works on the job too. Keith Roper of Woodland Hills, California, applied this principle to a situation in his company. Some material came to him in his print shop which was of exceptionally high quality. The printer who had done this job was a new employee who had been having difficulty adjusting to the job. His supervisor was upset about what he considered a negative attitude and was seriously thinking of terminating his services.

When Mr. Roper was informed of this situation, he personally went over to the print shop and had a talk with the young man. He told him how pleased he was with the work he had just received and pointed out it was the best work he had seen produced in that shop for some time. He pointed out exactly why it was superior and how important the young man's contribution was to the company.

Do you think this affected that young printer's attitude toward

the company? Within days there was a complete turnabout. He told several of his co-workers about the conversation and how someone in the company really appreciated good work. And from that day on, he was a loyal and dedicated worker.

What Mr. Roper did was not just flatter the young printer and say "You're good." He specifically pointed out how his work was superior. Because he had singled out a specific accomplishment, rather than just making general flattering remarks, his praise became much more meaningful to the person to whom it was given. Everybody likes to be praised, but when praise is specific, it comes across as sincere—not something the other person may be saying just to make one feel good.

Remember, we all crave appreciation and recognition, and will do almost anything to get it. But nobody wants insincerity. Nobody wants flattery.

Let me repeat: The principles taught in this book will work only when they come from the heart. I am not advocating a bag of tricks. I am talking about a new way of life.

Talk about changing people. If you and I will inspire the people with whom we come in contact to a realization of the hidden treasures they possess, we can do far more than change people. We can literally transform them.

Exaggeration? Then listen to these sage words from William James, one of the most distinguished psychologists and philosophers America has ever produced:

Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our physical and mental resources. Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives far within his limits. He possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use.

Yes, you who are reading these lines possess powers of various sorts which you habitually fail to use; and one of these powers you are probably not using to the fullest extent is your magic

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ability to praise people and inspire them with a realization of their latent possibilities.

Abilities wither under criticism; they blossom under encouragement. To become a more effective leader of people, apply . . .

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### PRINCIPLE 6

Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be "heartily in your approbation and lavish in your praise."

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